

THE GOSPEL'S POWER IN A CHRISTIAN'S LIFE

NO. 640

A SERMON PREACHED
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Only let your conversation be as it becomes the gospel of Christ.”
Philippians 1:27.*

THE word “conversation” does not merely mean our talk, one with another, but the whole course of our life and behavior in the world. The Greek word signifies the actions and the privileges of citizenship, and we are to let our whole citizenship—our actions as citizens of the new Jerusalem—be such as becomes the gospel of Christ. Observe, dear friends, the difference between the exhortations of the legalists, and those of the gospel. He who would have you perfect in the flesh, exhorts you to work that you may be saved, that you may accomplish a meritorious righteousness of your own, and so may be accepted before God. But he who is taught in the doctrines of divine grace, urges you to holiness for quite another reason. He believes you are saved, because you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and he speaks to as many as are saved in Jesus, and then he asks them to make their actions conformable to their position; he only seeks what he may reasonably expect to receive—“Let your conversation be such as becomes the gospel of Christ. You have been saved by it, you profess to glory in it, you desire to extend it; let then your conversation be such as becomes it.” The one, you perceive, bids you to work that you may enter heaven by your working; the other exhorts you to labor because heaven is yours as the gift of divine grace, and he would have you act as one who is made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. Some persons cannot hear an exhortation without at once crying out that we are legal. Such persons will always find this tabernacle the wrong place for them to feed in. We are delighted to preach good high doctrine, and to insist upon it that salvation is of grace alone; but we are equally delighted to preach good high practice and to insist upon it, that that grace which does not make a man better than his neighbors, is a grace which will never take him to heaven, nor render him acceptable before God.

I have already remarked that the exhortation is given in a form which is highly reasonable. The followers of any other religion, as a rule, are conformed to their religion. No nation has ever yet risen above the character of its so-called gods. Look at the disciples of Venus—were they not sunk deep in licentiousness? Look at the worshippers of Bacchus; let their Bacchanalian rebels tell how they entered into the character of their deity. The worshippers to this day of the goddess Kale—the goddess of thieves and murderers—the Thugs—enter most heartily into the spirit of the idol that they worship. We do not marvel at the crimes of the ancients when we recollect the gods whom they adored—Moloch, who delighted in the blood of little children; Jupiter, Mercury and the like, whose actions stored in the classical dictionary are enough to pollute the minds of youth. We marvel not that licentiousness abounded, for “like gods, like people.” “A people are never better than their religion,” it has often been said—but in most cases they are rather worse. It is strictly in accordance with nature that a man’s religion should season his conversation. Paul puts it, therefore, to you who profess to be saved by Jesus Christ, “Let your conversation be as it becomes the gospel of Christ.”

To get at this we must meditate for two or three minutes upon *what the gospel is*; then take up the points in which *our conversation ought to be like to the gospel*; and finally, utter a few earnest words to press upon professors of religion here *the stern necessity of letting their conversation be such as becomes the gospel of Christ*.

I. “THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST!” WHAT IS IT? We look at the last two words, “of Christ.” Indeed, if you understand Christ, you understand the gospel. Christ is the author of it; He, in the council chamber of eternity, proposed to become the surety for poor fallen man; He, in the fullness of time, worked out eternal redemption for as many as His Father had given Him. He is the author of it as its architect

and as its builder. We see in Christ Jesus the Alpha and the Omega of the gospel. He has provided in the treasury of grace all that is necessary to make the gospel the gospel of our salvation. And as He is the author of it, so He is the matter of it. It is impossible to preach the gospel without preaching the person, the work, the offices, and the character of Christ. If Christ is preached, the gospel is promulgated, and if Christ is put in the background, then there is no gospel declared. "God forbid that I should know anything among you," said the apostle, "save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," and so saying, he was carrying out his commission to preach the gospel both to Jews and to Gentiles. The sum total, the essential, the marrow—what the old Puritans would have called the quintessence of the gospel is, Christ Jesus! So that when we have done preaching the gospel we may say, "Now of the things which we have spoken He is the sum," and we may point to Him in the manger, to Him on the cross, to Him risen, to Him coming in the second advent, to Him reigning as Prince of the kings of the earth—yes, point to Him everywhere, as the sum total of the gospel.

It is also called, "The gospel of Christ," because it is He who will be the finisher of it; He will put the finishing stroke to the work as He laid the foundation stone. The believer does not begin in Christ, and then seek perfection in himself. No, as we run the heavenly race, we are still looking to Jesus. As His hand first tore away the sin, which does so easily beset us, and helped us to run the race with patience, so that same hand shall hold out the olive branch of victory, shall weave it into a wreath of glory, and put it about our head. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ—*His* property; it glorifies *His* person; it is sweet with the savor of *His* name. It bears throughout, the mark of His artistic fingers. If the heavens are the work of God's fingers, and the moon and the stars are by His ordinance, so we may say of the whole plan of salvation—the whole of it, great Jesus, is Your workmanship, and by Your ordinance it stands fast.

It is, "The gospel of Jesus Christ," and though hundreds of times this has been explained, it will not be amiss to go over it again. It is the "*good-spell*," the "*good news*," of Jesus Christ, and it is "good news" emphatically, because it clears away sin—the worst evil on earth. Better still, it sweeps away death and hell! Christ came into the world to take sin upon His shoulders and to carry it away, hurling it into the red sea of His atoning blood. Christ, the Scapegoat, took the sin of His people upon His own head and bore it all away into the wilderness of forgetfulness, where, if it is searched for, it shall be found no more forever. This is "good news," for it tells that the cancer at the vitals of humanity has been cured; that the leprosy which rose, even to the very brow of manhood, has been taken away; Christ has filled a better stream than the river Jordan, and now says to the sons of men, "Go, wash and be clean."

Besides removing the worst of ills, the gospel is "good news," because it brings the best of blessings. What does it do but give life to the dead? It opens dumb lips, unstops deaf ears, and unseals blind eyes. Does it not make earth the abode of peace? Has it not shut the doors of hell upon believers, and opened the gates of heaven to all who have learned to trust in Jesus' name? "Good news!" Why that word "good" has got a double meaning when it is applied to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Well were angels employed to go and tell it, and happy are the men, who spend and are spent, in the proclamation of such glad tidings of great joy. "God is reconciled!" "Peace on earth!" "Glory to God in the highest!" "Good-will towards men!" God is glorified in salvation, sinners are delivered from the wrath to come, and hell does not receive the multitudes of men, but heaven is filled with the countless host redeemed by blood!

It is "good news," too, because it is a thing that could not have been invented by the human intellect. It was news to angels! They have not ceased to wonder at it yet, they still stand looking upon the mercy seat, desiring to know more of it. It will be news in eternity; we shall—

*"Sing with rapture and surprise,
His loving kindness in the skies."*

The "good news," put simply into a few words, is just this—"That God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." So much, then, for *what the gospel is*.

II. Now, I am not going to speak to those who do not welcome the gospel—I will speak to them another time; I pray God helps them to believe it, but today I have especially to speak to believers. The text says we are to LET OUR CONVERSATION BE SUCH AS BECOMES THE GOSPEL.

What sort of conversation, then, shall we have? In the first place, *the gospel is very simple*. It is unadorned; no meretricious ornaments to clog the pile. It is simple—"Not with enticing words of man's wisdom." It is grandly sublime in its simplicity. Let the Christian be such. It does not become the Christian minister to be arrayed in blue, and scarlet, and fine linen, and vestments, and robes, for these belong to Antichrist, and are described in the Book of the Revelation, as the sure marks of the whore of Babylon. It does not become the Christian man or the Christian woman to be guilty of spending hours in the adornment of his or her person. Our adornment should be, "The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit." There should be about our manner, our speech, our dress, our whole behavior, that simplicity which is the very soul of beauty. Those who labor to make themselves admirable in appearance, by gaudy ornaments, miss the road; beauty is its own adornment and, "She is most adorned when unadorned the most." The Christian ought always to be simple in all respects. I think, wherever you find him, you ought not to need a key to him. He should not be like certain books that you cannot make out without having somebody tell you the hard words. He should be a transparent man like Nathaniel—"An Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile." The man who catches the spirit of his Master is, like Christ, a child-man, a man-child. You know they called Him, "That holy child, Jesus," so let us be, remembering that, "Except we are converted and become as *little children*," who are eminently simple and child-like, "we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven."

In the next place, if our conversation is such as becomes the gospel, we shall remember that the gospel is *pre-eminently true*. There is nothing in the gospel which is false; no admixture, nothing put in as an "*argumentum ad hominem*" to catch the popular ear. It tells the truth—the naked truth—and if men dislike it, the gospel cannot help it; it is gold without dross; it is pure water without admixture. Now, such should the Christian be. He should make his conversation *true*. The saints are men of honor, but sometimes, brethren, I think that many of us talk too much to speak nothing but the truth of God. I do not know how people could bring out broadsheets every morning with so much news if it were all true; I suppose there must be a little padding to fill it up, and some of that is very poor stuff. And people who keep on talking, talking, talking, cannot grind all meal; surely it must be, some of it, rather coarse bran. And in the conversation of a good many professing Christians, how much there is that is scandal, if not slander, uttered against other Christians? How much uncharitableness, if not willful lies, is spoken by some professors? Too often a rebuke is taken up heedlessly, and repeated without any care being taken to ascertain whether it is true or not. The Christian's lips should speak truth when lies drop from the lips of all other men. A Christian should never need to take an oath because his word is as good as an oath—his, "Yes," should be "Yes." And his, "No, no." It is for him to so live and speak that he shall be in good repute in all society—if not for the etiquette of his manners, certainly for the truthfulness of his utterances. Show me a man who is habitually or frequently a liar, and you show me a man who will have his portion in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. I do not care to what denomination of Christians he may belong, if a man speaks the thing that is not, I am sure he is none of Christ's; and it is very sad to know that there are some in all fellowships who have this great and grievous fault—that you cannot trust them in what they say. God deliver us from that! Let our conversation be such as becomes the gospel of Christ, and then it will be invariably truthful; or, if there is error in it, it will always be through misadventure, and never on purpose or from carelessness.

In the next place, the gospel of Jesus Christ is a very *fearless gospel*. It is the very reverse of that pretty thing called "modern charity." The last created devil is "modern charity." "Modern charity" goes cap in hand round to us all, and it says, "You are *all* right, every one of you! Do not quarrel any longer! Sectarianism is a horrid thing—down with it! Down with it!" And so it tries to induce all sorts of persons to withhold a part of what they believe—to silence the testimony of all Christians upon points wherein they differ. I believe that that thing called Sectarianism nowadays is none other than true honesty. Be a Sectarian, my brother—be profoundly a Sectarian! I mean by that, hold everything which you see to be in God's Word with a tighter grasp, and do not give up even the little pieces of truth. At the

same time, let that Sectarianism, which makes you hate another man because he does not agree with you—let that be far from you! And never consent to that unholy league and covenant, which seems to be rife throughout our country, which would put a padlock on the mouth of every man and send us all about as if we were dumb—which says to me, “You must not speak against the errors of such-and-such a church.” And to another, “You must not reply.” We cannot but speak! If we did not, the stones in the street might cry out against us!

That kind of charity is unknown to the gospel. Now hear the Word of God, “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; he who believes not”—what? “Shall get to heaven some other way”? NO!—“shall be damned”! That is the gospel. You perceive how boldly it launches out its censure? It does not pretend, “You may reject Me and go by another road, and at last get safely to your journey’s end!” No, no, no!—you “*Shall be damned*,” it says! Do you not perceive how Christ puts it? Some teachers come into the world and say to all, “Yes, gentlemen, by your leave, you are all right. I have a point or two that you have not taught, just make room for me; I will not turn you out; I can stand in the same temple as yourself.” But hear what Christ says—“All who ever came before Me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.” Hear what His servant Paul says, “Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you”—what then?—“Let him be excused for his mistake?” No! But, “Let him be *accursed*”! Now, this is strong language, but mark you, this is just how the Christian ought to live. As the gospel is very fearless in what it has to say, so let the Christian always be. It strikes me that a “living” which becomes the gospel of Christ, is always a bold and fearless kind of living! Some people go crawling through the world as if they asked some great man’s permission to live. They do not know their own minds; they take their words out of their mouths, and look at them, and ask a friend or two’s opinion. “What do you think of these words?” And when these friends censure them, they put them in again and will not say them. Like jellyfish, they have no backbone. Now God has made men upright, and it is a noble thing for a man to stand erect on his own feet; and it is a nobler thing still for a man to say that in Christ Jesus he has received that freedom which is freedom indeed, and therefore he will not be the slave of any man.

“O God,” says David, “I am Your servant, for You have loosed my bonds.” Happy is he whose bonds are loosed! Let your eyes be like that of an eagle, yes, let them be brighter still; let them never be dimmed by the eyes of any other man. Let your heart be like that of the lion, fearless! Say of yourself—

*“Careless, myself a dying man,
Of dying men’s esteem,”*

I must live as in the sight of God, as I believe I should live, and then let man say his best or say his worst—it shall be no more than the chirping of a grasshopper when the sun goes down. “Who are you that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, or the son of man that is but a worm?” Make yourselves like men! Be strong! Fear not! For only so will your conversation be such as becomes the gospel of Christ.

But again, the gospel of Christ is *very gentle*. Hear it speak! “Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Here is its spirit in its founder—“He will not quench the smoking flax. A bruised reed He will not break.” Moreover, bad temper, snapping off of people’s heads, making men offenders for a word—all this, is quite contrary to the gospel. There are some people who seem to have been nursed upon vinegar, and whose entire attitude far better suits Sinai than Zion; you might think that they had always come to the mount that might not be touched, which burns with fire, for they seem themselves to burn with fire. I may say to them, that the best of them is sharper than a thorn hedge. Now, dear friends, let it never be so with us. Be firm, be bold, be fearless; but be cautious. If you have a lion’s heart, have a lady’s hand; let there be such a gentleness about your carriage that the little children may not be afraid to come to you, and the publican and harlot may not be driven away by your hostility, but invited to goodness by the gentleness of your words and acts.

Again, the gospel of Christ is *very loving*. It is the speech of the God of love to a lost and fallen race. It tells us that, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” It proclaims in every word the divine grace of Him, “Who loved us and gave Himself for us.” “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his

life for his friends." This same mind which was in Christ Jesus should dwell richly in us. His last command to His disciples was, "Love one another." He who loves is born of God, while without this grace, whatever we may think of ourselves, or others may think of us, we are really, in God's sight, nothing better than sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. Is not this an age in which we shall do well to direct our attention to the flower of paradise? The atmosphere of the church should foster this heavenly plant to the highest perfection. The world ought to point to us and say, "See how these Christians love one another? Not in word only, but in deed and in truth." I care not for that love which calls me a dearly beloved brother, and then if I happen to differ in sentiment and practice, treats me as a schismatic, denies me the rights of the brotherhood, and if I do not choose to subscribe to an arbitrarily imposed contribution to its funds, seizes my goods and sells them in the name of the law, order, and Church of Christ. From all such sham love, good Lord, deliver us; but oh, for more real hearty union and love to all the saints—for more of that realization of the fact that we are one in Christ Jesus. At the same time pray for more love to all men. We ought to love all our hearers, and the gospel is to be preached by us to every creature. I hate sin everywhere, but I love and wish to love yet more and more every day, the souls of the worst and vilest of men. Yes, the gospel speaks of love, and I must breathe it forth, too, in every act and deed. If our Lord was love incarnate, and we are His disciples, "Let all take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus and learned of Him."

The gospel of Christ, again, is the *gospel of mercy*, and if any man would act as becomes the gospel, he must be a man of mercy. Do I see him? He is praying. He has been to the sacramental table, and he has been drinking the wine which betokens the Savior's blood—what a good man he is! But see him on Monday—he has got his hands on his brother's throat, with—"Pay me what you owe!" Is that such as becomes the gospel of Christ? There he sits—he will give his subscription to a charity, but he will grind down the needle-woman, he will get fat on her blood and bones; he will take a grasp, if he can, of the poor, and sell them, and devour them as though they were bread, and yet, at the same time, "for a pretense he will make long prayers." Is this such as becomes the gospel of Christ? I think not. The gospel of Christ is mercy, generosity, hope. It receives the beggar and hears his cry; it picks up even the vile and undeserving, and scatters lavish blessings upon them and it fills the bosom of the naked and of the hungry with good things. Let your conversation be such as becomes the gospel of Christ. You *miserly* and *stingy* people have not a conversation such as becomes the gospel of Christ. There might be plenty of money in God's treasury, for God's Church and for God's poor, if there were not some who seem to live only to amass, and to hoard; their life is diametrically opposed to the whole current and spirit of the gospel of Christ Jesus. Forgive all who offend you, help all, as far as you are able to do it, live a life of unselfishness; be prepared, as much as lies in you, to do good unto all men, and especially to the household of faith, and so shall your conversation be such as becomes the gospel of Christ.

I must not, however, omit to say that the gospel of Christ is *holy*. You cannot find it excusing sin. It pardons it, but not without an atonement so dreadful, that sin never seems so exceedingly sinful as in the act of mercy which puts it away. "Holy! Holy! Holy!" is the cry of the gospel, and such is the cry of cherubim and seraphim. Now, if our conversation is to be like the gospel, we must be holy too. There are some things which the Christian must not even name, much less indulge in. The grosser vices are to him things to be hidden behind the curtain, and totally unknown. The amusements and pleasures of the world, so far as they may be innocent, are his, as they are other men's; but wherein they become sinful or doubtful, he discards them with disgust, for he has secret sources of joy, and needs not therefore to go and drink of that muddy river, of which thirsty worldlings are so fond. He seeks to be holy, as Christ is holy; and there is no conversation which becomes the gospel of Christ except that.

III. Dear friends, I might thus continue, for the subject is a very wide one, and I only stop because, unhappily for me, though perhaps happily for your patience, my time has gone. Having just indicated what the Christian life ought to be, I must, in a few words, plead with you that by the power of God's Holy Spirit, you will seek to make your lives such. I could mention many reasons—I will only give you one or two. The first is, if you do not live like this, you will make your fellow members who are innocent of your sin, suffer. This ought to be a very convincing motive. If a Christian could dishonor himself, and bear the blame alone, why he might put up with it, but you cannot. I say, sir, if you are seen

intoxicated, or if you are known to fall into some sin of the flesh, you will make the life of every poor girl in the church harder than it is, and every poor young man who has to put up with persecution will feel that you have put a sting into the arrows of the wicked, which could not otherwise have been there. You sin against the congregation of God's people. I know there are some of you here who have to suffer a good deal for Christ's sake. The jeer rings in your ears from morning to night, and you learn to put up with it manfully; but it is very hard when they can say to you, "Look at So-and-So—he is a church member, look at what he did—you are all a parcel of hypocrites!" Now, my dear friends, you know that is not true; you know that there are many in our churches of whom the world is not worthy—the excellent, the devout, the Christ-like. Do not sin, then, for their sakes, lest you make them to be grieved and sorely vexed.

Again, do you not see how you make your Lord suffer, for they do not lay your sins merely at *your* door, but they say they spring from your religion. If they would impute the folly to the fool I might not care, but they impute it to the wisdom which would have made that fool wise, if he could have learned. They will lay it at my door—that does not matter much—I have long lost my character; but I cannot bear it should be laid at Christ's door—at the door of the gospel. When I said just now that I had lost my character, I meant just this, that the world loathes me, and I would not have it do otherwise, so let it, I say, there is no love lost between us. If the world hates Christ's minister, he can only say he desires that he may never inherit the curse of those who love the world, "in whom the love of the Father is not." Yet it has always been the lot of the true Christian minister to be the butt of slander and, nevertheless, to glory in the cross with all its shame. But I know, dear friends, you would not, any of you, wish that I should bear the reproach of your sins, and yet I have to do it very often—not very often for many, but for some. There are those, of whom I might tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; and some others whom we would pluck out of the fire, hating the garment spotted with the flesh, but they bring sad dishonor upon us, upon the ministry, upon the gospel, and upon Christ Himself. You do not want to do that! At least, I hope you do not; then let your conversation be such as becomes the gospel of Christ.

And then, remember, dear friends, unless your conversation is such, you will pull down all the witness that you have ever borne for Christ. How can your Sunday school children believe what you tell them, when they see your actions contradict your teaching? How can your own children at home believe in your religion, when they see the godlessness of your life? The men at the factory will not believe in your going to prayer meeting, when they see you walking inconsistently among them. Oh, the great thing the church needs is more holiness! The worst enemies of the church are not the infidels—really, one does not know who the infidels are nowadays; they are so small a fry, and so few of them, that one would have to hunt to find them out. No, the worst enemies of the church are the hypocrites, the formalists, the mere professors, the inconsistent walkers. You, if there are any such here—you pull down the walls of Jerusalem, you open the gates to her foes, and, as much as lies in you, you serve the devil! May God forgive you! May Christ forgive you! May you be washed from this atrocious sin! May you be brought humbly to the foot of the cross, to accept mercy, which, until now, you have rejected!

It is shocking to think how persons dare to remain members of Christian Churches, and even to enter the pulpit, when they are conscious that their private life is foul. Oh, how can they do it? How is it that their hearts have grown so hard? What? Has the devil bewitched them? Has he turned them away from being men, and made them as devilish as himself, that they should dare to pray in public, and to sit at the sacramental table, and to administer ordinances while their hands are foul, and their hearts unclean and their lives are full of sin? I charge you, if there are any of you whose lives are not consistent, give up your profession, or else make your lives what they should be. May the Eternal Spirit, who still winnows His Church, blow away the chaff, and leave only the good golden wheat upon the floor! And if you know yourselves to be living in any sin, may God help you to mourn over it, to loathe it, to go to Christ about it tonight—to take hold of Him, to wash His feet with your tears, to repent unfeignedly—and then to begin anew in His strength, a life which shall be such as becomes the gospel.

I think I hear some ungodly person here saying, "Well I do not make any profession, I am all right." Now, listen, dear friend, listen! I have got a word for you. A man is brought up before the magistrates,

and he says, "Well, I never made any profession of being an honest man." "Oh," says the magistrate, "there is six months for you then"—you see he is a villain outright. And you who say, "Oh, I never made any profession," why, by putting yourselves on that ground, you place yourselves among the condemned ones. But some people make a boast of it. "I never made a profession." Never made a profession of doing your duty to your Maker? Never made a profession of being obedient to the God in whose hands your breath is? Never made a profession of being obedient to the gospel? Why, it will be very short work with you, when you come to be tried at last; there will need to be no witnesses, for you never made a profession—you never pretended to be right. What would you think of a man who said, "Well, I never made a profession of speaking the truth."? "Well," says another, "I never made a profession of being chaste." Why, you would say, "Let us get out of this fellow's company, because evidently nothing but evil can come from him, for he is not good enough even to make a profession!"

Now, I put that strongly that you may remember it; will you go home and just meditate on this—"I never made a profession of being saved. I never made a profession of repenting of my sins, and therefore I am every day making a profession of being God's enemy, of being impenitent, of being unbelieving. And when the devil comes to look for his own, he will know me, for I make a profession of being one of his by not making a profession of being one of Christ's." The fact is, I pray God to bring us all here, first to be Christ's, and then to make a profession of it. Oh that your heart might be washed in Jesus' blood, and then, having given it to Christ, give it to Christ's people. The Lord bless these words of mine for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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